

Bukkehorn- Goat horn/Trumpet Horn and Reed Horn/Tongue Horn

History, construction, and playing

Bukkehorn is a traditional folk wind instrument made from animal horns, usually of goats. Folk names include *prillarhorn*, *(s)tutarhorn*, *låtarhorn*, and *spelarhorn*. In Norway, the tradition is ancient, dating back to the Stone Age, when horns were used to signal or to frighten beasts.

In Norway, two types of goathorn are distinguished:

- **Trumpet horn**, lips against the mouthpiece (lip-to-lip vibration)
- **Reed horn (tongue horn)**, with a thin juniper reed, like a simple clarinet (reed vibration)

The reed horn has been most widespread in central Norway (Trøndelag, Gudbrandsdalen), while the trumpet horn has been more common further south (Hallingdal, Numedal, Telemark, Hordaland, Sogn og Fjordane).

In collections and sources, horns are found from 2–3 finger holes in older forms to instruments with 6–7 holes. Reed horns generally have more holes than trumpet horns. Today, these horn types have become more standardized: a typical trumpet horn has five finger holes, while a reed horn has seven to eight. Both are tuned to a natural minor scale.

The bukkehorn is primarily a solo instrument and has been closely associated with herding, mountain pastures, and signaling. Much of the repertoire consists of simple calls and short melodic phrases, but it also includes vocal material and dance music such as lullabies, hymns, pols, and halling tunes.



Figure 1. Close-up of the wooden reed on a reed horn



Figure 2. Trumpet horn



Figure 3. Reed horn

How to Build a Bukkehorn (Trumpet horn)

Preparing the horn

First, remove the inner core of the horn by boiling it in water for 1–2 hours – preferably outdoors. (In exceptional cases, you can let blowflies clean the horn – very slow and uncommon.) Once the core is gone, you can boil the horn again and use for example baking soda. Clean the inside thoroughly with a bottle brush to remove remaining fatty membranes and other residues. Sand the horn if the surface is rough or splintered, or according to personal aesthetic preference.

Blowing end / mouthpiece

Measure the length of the hollow cavity inside the horn (e.g., with a steel wire) and mark it. Saw off the horn 2–3 cm above the mark. Drill into the horn from the cut surface using a 4 mm drill bit until you reach the cavity. Form a U-shaped cup for the mouthpiece with a small knife or a carbide file on a drill.

Test-blow the horn and listen to the fundamental pitch and tone quality. The fundamental pitch is mainly determined by the horn's length. It can be lowered slightly by widening the air channel (max approx. 8–10 mm). Shorten the horn if you want a brighter fundamental pitch.

1. Finger holes and tuning

Find a comfortable grip with the right hand roughly in the middle of the horn. Mark the positions of four finger holes on top and one thumb hole underneath. Drill the holes first with a 4 mm bit. Tune the holes one at a time, from the little finger upward, by widening each hole until the desired intervals are reached. Larger finger holes and/or thinner horn walls produce higher pitches.

2. Final adjustments and appearance

Make final adjustments and decoration. It is common to drill one or two hanging holes, usually near the outer edge. Rub the horn with a small amount of oil, such as cold-pressed linseed oil or cooking oil.

This paper is made in connection to the event “Læven og lokk – Nordic instrument-making seminar” in Oslo, 23–24 October 2025, photographs by Karstein Grønnesby. The seminar was organized by Karstein Grønnesby and Sylvelin Hege Sevilhaug in cooperation with Norsk lur- og bukkehornlag.

Video from the instrument-building seminar:

<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/c-WmTTitUIM>

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Figure 4. “Fresh” goat horns